

**From:** Steve Sarette  
**To:** Microsoft ATR  
**Date:** 1/23/02 2:02pm  
**Subject:** Microsoft Settlement

Hello,

I'm writing to voice my opinion that the proposed Microsoft settlement is a bad idea. Any settlement that does not force Microsoft to open its file formats and its API set is a bad idea.

I've been working in the computing industry for 17 years now so I've seen a lot of the history of this thing. As I see it, the fundamental problem with Microsoft's monopoly is not the cost of their products or the "innovation" that they bring to software development. Instead, it is the control they exert over the data on the machines. After all, for most of us the data is the central point of computing. It is the reason why we use a computer in the first place.

By data I mean the word processing file that you are working on. Or your email. Or your personal/business finances, or the website that you are developing. It is that new song you wrote and want to digitally record. It is the research that you want to do online.

By allowing Microsoft to maintain an unsupervised monopoly on the desktop, we are handing them the ability to control how data is recorded, edited, and accessed. We allow them to determine how we can speak our minds, run our businesses, even build our products. And when we do that, we give them the ability to levy a tax on, effectively, our ideas.

For example, today when people want to collaborate on a document it is not unusual for them to use Microsoft Word to do so. After all, Word is bundled with most machines that come pre-loaded with MS Windows (which is to say over 95% of all computers sold). Almost everyone has it. It is convenient to do so.

But what if I don't want to use Windows? What if I prefer to use an Apple Macintosh instead? Sure Word is available for the Mac -- for a few hundred dollars.

Or what if, instead, I'm one of the millions of users of Unix operating systems and their variants? While there are plenty of products like Microsoft Word for those platforms, Word itself is not available there. Yet because Microsoft keeps its file formats a secret, the interoperability between those products and Word is difficult at best.

So because 95% of the work force is using Word, the rest of us are forced to use it as well. If I want to use a Unix machine to do my job,

I still have to purchase a windows machine in order to collaborate with my colleagues. Even worse, if one of my colleagues decides to purchase a new Windows machine, most likely he will receive a new version of Word on that new box. But because Microsoft does not provide compatibility even between different versions of their own products, that means everyone else will also have to upgrade Word (at no small cost) if we want to effectively continue to collaborate on documents.

Ultimately this is how Microsoft's continued monopoly and habit of bundling software with their operating system hurts consumers. I can't use a low-cost alternative to Microsoft's software because it is too difficult to make that software work with Microsoft. So my alternative is to purchase expensive hardware and software that I don't want and then forever after to be on Microsoft's upgrade path.

By the way, I already see this pattern repeating with Internet Explorer. Most website today are tuned to work best with IE. If you tend to access the web with browsers other than IE, you will find websites that do not render properly or refuse you access altogether. I wonder how long it will be before the entire web is an IE-only experience, if only because that is the most convenient, and inexpensive, thing to do? I wonder how long after that it will be before I am forced to start paying for IE upgrades?

Please reject any settlement that does not require Microsoft to open its file formats and its API set (the two are joined at the hip). The settlement should require this of all current and future Microsoft products. Further, there should be external auditing and supervision to ensure that Microsoft complies with any such settlement.

Thank you for your attention.

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